

COINS

Gold mintage proposal gets a dim reception

By Roger Boye

Here's a hodgepodge of notes on the world's greatest hobby.

• Is there a new United States gold coin in our future?

The federal government hasn't minted gold coins since 1933, but a conservative U.S. senator wants the Treasury Department to issue them once again in various sizes and weights "appropriate to meet public demand."

Sen. Jesse Helms (R., N.C.) introduced a gold-coinage bill in Congress, but experts give it little chance of passage. After all, they say, the mint has been making gold medallions for nearly a year now, and they are as popular as a lead balloon. (Coins are "legal money," medallions aren't.)

• Bankers in Chicago already have put thousands of 1981-dated cents and nickels into circulation, judging from several reports made by Tribune readers.

One collector, a 13-year-old from Stickney, received his first 1981 penny on Jan. 26. Last year, he waited until April to get a 1980-dated coin.

At least three other readers say they found 1981 coins in January. Normally, coins bearing the new year's date don't turn up in change until March.

• As expected, mint director Mrs. Stella Hackel Sims announced that she will resign April 1.

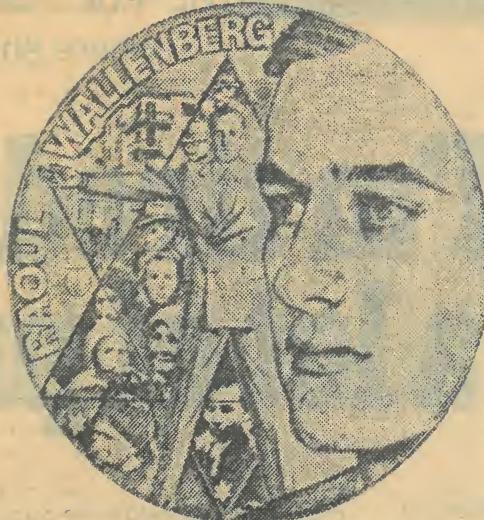
Although a mint director is supposed to serve a five-year term, the job is a political appointment and the director usually resigns soon after a new administration takes office. Ex-President Jimmy Carter appointed Mrs. Sims director in 1977.

In a "farewell interview" in Numismatic News, Mrs. Sims defended the Anthony dollar once again, insisting the government would save \$50 million a year in production costs by substituting the coin for dollar bills.

• Double-digit inflation has forced the Bureau of the Mint to jack up the prices it charges for official government medals.

Effective immediately, most of the 3-inch bronze medals cost \$8.30 when ordered by mail. The mint had charged \$5.25; administrators blame higher material and postage costs for the increase.

Machines churn out more than 200 types of medals, including ones honoring each President



Judaic Heritage Society medal honoring Raoul Wallenberg

(Ronald Reagan's is being designed). The government first issued medals during the Revolutionary War to present to war heroes; many of the medals made today — including some of the presidential medals — are copies of items first minted in the 18th or 19th Centuries.

For more information about the government's

medal program, write to the Bureau of the Mint, 55 Mint St., San Francisco, Cal. 94175.

• Nearly 40 coin and stamp dealers will sell their wares from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. next Sunday at the Civic Auditorium in Kankakee. Admission is free and door prizes will be awarded, said Donald Merrill, secretary of the Kankakee Valley Coin and Stamp Club, show sponsors.

And don't forget: The three-day Chicago International Coin Fair starts Thursday at the Hyatt Regency Hotel, 151 E. Wacker Dr.

• The "Hero of the Holocaust" — a Swedish Christian who saved the lives of thousands of Jews during World War II — is depicted on the annual medal of the Judaic Heritage Society.

Raoul Wallenberg went to Budapest in 1944, and flew the Swedish flag from "safe houses" that he had rented to protect Jews fleeing the Nazis. He also stood on top of a deportation train, handing out Swedish identity papers to all within reach, and then insisted those people were under his protection.

Although Wallenberg was last seen in the hands of two Russian officers in January, 1945, some historians believe he may still be alive in a Russian prison.

The 1 1/4-inch medal is available in four types of metals. For price and ordering information, write the society at P.O. Box 2022, New York, N.Y. 10168.